PD WEEKLY, VOL. 2, ISS. 9



"The Love Song" by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (British, Birmingham 1833–1898 Fulham) via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0

ANNE REEVE ALDRICH
ALEXANDER PUSHKIN
BRANDER MATTHEWS
EDGAR ALLAN POE

Back to basics with humor, romance, and science fiction.
Editor: Matt Pierard

A LAMENTABLE COMEDY

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Village Ophelia and Other Stories*
by Anne Reeve Aldrich

I stood one July noon on the platform of the desolate station at Wauchittic, the sole passenger waiting for the stage. The heat was quivering in the air. I watched the departing train, whirling like a little black ball down the narrow yellow road, cut between the green fields, and was vaguely glad that I was not going to the end of the Island on it. This was somewhere near the middle, and it was quite far enough from civilization.

The village, like so many Long Island villages, was distant from the railroad. Only one or two farm-houses were in sight. There was hardly a sound in the hot noonday air, now that the train had gone, except the whistling of a cheerful station agent, who sat in the window of the little oven-like Queen Anne structure, in his shirt sleeves, looking out at me with lively interest. I had sought for a quiet country place in which to finish my novel, the book which would decide beyond doubt whether I had a future as a writer, or whether I was doomed to sink to the level of the ordinary literary hack, for into it I had put, I knew, all that was my best.

As I looked absently down the track, I reviewed the past winter months, the long days and evenings spent at my desk in the stuffy little lodgings to which I was limited by my narrow income, interrupted frequently by invasions on various pretexts of the ill-fed chambermaid, who insisted on telling me her woes, or by my neighbor from the next room, the good little spinster, who always knocked to ask if she might heat a flat-iron at my grate when I was in the midst of a bit of minute description. She would sit down, too, would poor withered Miss Jane, in my little rocking-chair to wait while the iron heated, and she said she often told the landlady she did not know how I could write, I had so many interruptions.

I had come to a place now, I thought, trying to quell the sense of loneliness that oppressed me, as I looked around at the expanse of stunted wood and scrub-oaks, where I could be perfectly undisturbed. If the farmer's family with whom I was to board, were noisy or intrusive, one could take one's writing materials and go--well, somewhere--into the woods, perhaps. I was only twenty-two, and I was sanguine.

I saw a cloud of white dust down the road--nothing more, but the station-agent, with a certainty born of long experience, shouted encouragingly: "Thar she comes!" and presently I found myself in a large, sombre and warm conveyance, very like the wagon known to the New York populace familiarly, if not fondly, as "the Black Maria."

The driver was a tow-headed lad of sixteen, so consumed with blushes that, out of pity, I refrained from questions, and sat silently enduring the heat behind the black curtains, while we traversed, it seemed to me, miles of dusty, white road, bordered by ugly, flat fields, or dwarf woods and undergrowth, before we stopped at a smart white farm-house. The farmer's wife, hearing our approach, stood on the little porch to welcome me. Mrs. Hopper gave a peculiar glance at my begrimed person and face, and I followed her up the narrow stairs with an odd, homesick sinking of the heart, seized by a momentary pang of that "nostalgia of the pavement," felt oftener by the poor than rich dwellers of the city, in exile. Perhaps I loved New York in an inverse ratio to what I had suffered in it. All the miseries of hope deferred, unremitting labor, and unnumbered petty cares attendant upon a straightened income, were forgotten, and I yearned for its ugly, midsummer glare, even its unsavory odors, and my stifling little chamber "_au troisième_" as I surveyed the tiny bare room, with its blue and gray "cottage set," its white-washed walls, hung with a solitary engraving of Lincoln and his Cabinet. It was not a beautiful spot, truly, yet I thought dubiously, as I drank in the silence, it might be a very good place in which to bring to an end the sufferings of my heroine, who had agonized through several hundred pages of manuscript.

"I expect you're tired," said Mrs. Hopper, sitting down carefully on the edge of the feather-bed to which I was condemned. "It's a pretty quiet place here--ain't much of a village, but then you said you wanted a quiet place to write in. I guess you'll be s'prised--there's another orther here. Maybe you know him, his name's Longworth, John Longworth? Don't! Why, he lives to New York! No, he ain't right here in the house, he's across the street to the Bangses', but you'll see him," she said, encouragingly. "It'll be awful pleasant for you two orthers to get acquainted. The Bangses don't keep cows, an' every night at milkin' time, over he comes to get a glass o' warm milk; guess he likes to talk to our men-folks. Old Bangs ain't much comp'ny for anybody, let alone a writer. He's got a man with him to wait on him; a kind o' nurse, I b'lieve. He was near dead before he came here, though he looks pretty smart now--had a fever. Some of the folks here hev got it around he was out of his head, a man so, a-settin' around out o' doors, writin' from mornin' till night. Lord, how mad it made the Bangses!" Mrs. Hopper indulged in an abrupt retrospective laugh of enjoyment. "They was so set up, havin' a writer there, an' Mary Bangs was pretty well taken down when I told her we was a-goin' to have one here. She acted as if she didn't b'lieve there was more'n one orther to New York, an' that was Mr. Longworth," continued Mrs. Hopper, regarding me with a proprietor's pride, as I removed my hat and hung it on a nail driven in the wall. I smiled as I reflected that I, too, should doubtless be looked on with suspicion as a fit subject for a straight-jacket, if I, an able-bodied young woman, should sit "out o' doors" with my writing, while my

presumable betters were working.

"Well, I guess I'll go down now," said Mrs. Hopper, after a brief pause, in which she examined my gown. "I expect you want y'r dinner. We live a good piece from the store, Miss Marriott an' any time if you should get out of ink, don't make any bones of asking for it. We've got some right here in the house, an' you're as welcome to it as if you was my own daughter."

I was glad to find, at dinner, that the family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Hopper only, with the exception of a couple of farm-hands, whose lumbering tread down the back-stairs wakened me each morning about four. I found Mr. Hopper a tall, bent old man, with meek, faded blue eyes, and a snowy frill of beard. He had an especially sweet and pathetic voice, with a little quaver in it, like a bashful girl's.

He laid down his knife and fork, and looked at me with an air of gentle inquiry, as I took my seat at the table. "Mrs. Hopper tells me you're a literary," he said at length. I'm afraid I replied, "Yes?" with the rising inflection of the village belle, nothing else occurring to me to say.

"Well," said Mr. Hopper, softly, pushing back his chair, and rising to leave the table, "it's in our fam'ly some too. And in Ma's. One o' my uncles and one o' her brothers." He shuffled out of the room with a placid smile, as Mrs. Hopper said, deprecatingly, but with conscious pride, "La, pa, Jim never wrote more'n two or three pieces."

For a few days I took a vacation. I wandered about the "back lots," down to the mill-dam, up and down the lonely, winding street where all the prim houses--and they were very far apart--wore a desolate, closed look, as though the inhabitants were away, or dead. I grew accustomed to my environments; the little bedroom began to seem like home to me. On my way to the post-office some one passed me on the sandy, yellow patch, a man clothed after the manner of civilization, whose garments, cut by no country tailor, were not covered by overalls. I knew it must be "the other orther." None of the males in Wauchittic appeared in public, except on Sunday, save in overalls. It would have been, I think, considered unseemly, if not indecent.

The man was young, with a worn, delicate face, marked by ill-health, and though I had studiously avoided the yard near "milkin' time," in spite of Mrs. Hopper's transparent insistance each evening on my going out to see the brindled heifer, I think my indifferent glance was assumed, for though John Longworth, so far as I knew, had not his name inscribed on the records of fame, and was probably a penny-a-liner on a third-rate newspaper, I had the instinct of fellow-craft, that is, alas! strongest in the unknown and ardent young writer. He walked feebly, and his

brilliant eyes were haggard and circled, as though by long illness. I saw him drive by nearly every afternoon, accompanied by his nurse, a good-humored young fellow, who helped him tenderly into the carriage, and drove, while he lay back with the irritated expression that the sense of enforced idleness and invalidism gives a man in the heyday of youth. Mrs. Hopper, who was loquacious to a degree, told me long stories of his parents' wealth, of the luxuries brought down with him, and of the beautiful pieces of furniture he had had sent down for his room, for his physician had recommended him to an absolutely quiet place for the entire summer. She burned with an irrepressible desire to have me make the acquaintance of this son of wealth and literature, either from the feminine proclivity for match-making, or because, possibly, she thought, having an intense reverence for writers, that our conversation would be of an edifying and uncommon character. I fear she was disappointed, for on the occasion of our first meeting,--I believe Mr. Longworth came to see Mrs. Hopper on some trifling business, and I happened to be writing on the front porch,--our remarks were certainly of the most commonplace type, and I saw a shade of disappointment steal across her face, as she stood by triumphantly, having accomplished her wish to "get us acquainted."

Mr. Longworth overtook me the next day, as I was returning listlessly, toward noon, from a long walk, my arms full of glowing St. John's wort, the color of sunset. Back of me lay the long stretch of flat road, and the fields on either side were scorched with the sun. The heat was intolerable. Mr. Longworth would carry the flowers for me, and I resigned them, knowing that nothing is more distasteful to a man than to be treated like an invalid. And the bunch was really a heavy burden,--I had gathered such an enormous armful, together with some tender creepers of blackberry vine. We chatted of the place, of the people, and I found that my companion had a keen sense of humor. As we neared the house, after a moment's hesitancy, I asked him to come and rest on the little porch, where a couple of splint rockers and a palm-leaf fan invited one to comfort and coolness. He accepted the invitation with alacrity, though he chose to sit on the wooden steps, while I tilted lazily back and forth, overcome by the noonday lull and heat.

He looked so boyish when he took off his hat, with the dark little curls falling over his forehead, that I thought he could not be older than I. The walk had perhaps been more than he could bear, for he was so pale that I could not help saying, "Pardon me, Mr. Longworth, but you look so ill. Will you let me give you a glass of wine?" I had brought a little with me. He looked slightly annoyed, but he answered gayly,

"I suppose Mrs. Hopper has been telling you I am a confirmed invalid. Indeed I am almost well now, and I need Wilson about as much as I need a perambulator, but I knew if I did not bring him, my mother would give up Bar Harbor, and insist on burying herself with me, either here or at

some other doleful spot, stagnation having been prescribed for me. Oh, well, I don't mind the quiet," he continued, leaning his broad shoulders against the pillar, and pulling at a bit of the St. John's wort, for he had thrown it down in a straggling heap on the floor of the porch. "I'm at work on--on a book," he said with a boyish blush.

"Yes," I replied, smiling. "Mrs. Hopper told me that there was 'an orther,' in Wauchittic."

"And that was what Mrs. Bangs told me the other day!" he declared audaciously. And then we both laughed with the foolish gaiety of youth, that rids itself thus of embarrassment.

"It is my first book," he confessed.

"And mine," I said.

Our eyes met a little wistfully, as if each were striving to read whether the other had gone through the same burning enthuiasms for work, the same loving belief in its success, the same despondent hours when it seemed an utter failure, devoid of sense or interest, and then, somehow, we felt suddenly a mutual confidence, a sense that we knew each other well, the instant _camaraderie_ of two voyagers who find that they have sailed the same seas, passed through the same dangers, and stopped at the same ports.

I heard Mrs. Hopper open the hall-door, caught a glimpse of her looking out at us with satisfaction on her face, warm from the kitchen fire, and heard her close it, with much elaboration, and, tip-toe heavily away.

"Yes, this is my first book," he went on, as though we had not paused. "Of course I have had experience in writing before, magazine sketches, and that sort of thing, and beside that, I once had a mania for newspaper work, and much to my mother's horror, I was really a reporter on one of the city papers--_The Earth_."

"Circulation guaranteed over 380,000," I continued, rather ashamed of my flippancy, although he laughed.

"Exactly. Well, after a time I had an offer to go on the editorial staff of the _Eon_, through a friend who has influence with the management, and it was just then I was taken ill with this typhoid fever that has left me the wreck you see," he said, with a whimsically sad smile. "That is not the worst, though," he went on, a shadow falling over his upturned face, "I cannot explain it, although my doctor pretends to. I had written--oh! say half-a-dozen chapters of this book before my sickness. As soon as I began to be convalescent, I wanted to amuse

myself by going on with it. I had my plot roughly blocked out, my characters were entirely distinct in my mind, yet when I took up my pen again, I found I could not write connectedly. It was simply horrible. I shall never forget that day. Of course I imagined I should never write again. I sent for two or three doctors, announced that I had paresis, and was told that it was madness for a man who had been as ill as I to attempt any sort of literary work for weeks, if not months. But the sense that I absolutely could not write preyed upon me. I used to do a little each day in spite of their orders, but it is only now that I am beginning to feel the confusion of ideas lessening, and the ability to present them coherently growing Even yet I only write disconnected parts of the chapters I had planned. It is--oh! what is that pet word of phrenologists? _continuity_, that I have not at my command. I suppose you cannot quite understand the agony of such an experience, never having gone through it. Only yesterday I tore up thirty pages of manuscript, and had more than half a mind to burn the whole thing. It is only the consideration of the possibly great loss to the literary world that withholds me, you know," he said with a half bitter laugh, throwing down the ruins of the flowers he had pulled to pieces with his thin, nervous hands, and rising.

"But I've been an unconscionable bore, even for a valetudinarian, and I believe they are privileged to tax people's amiability. I hope I havn't tired you so that you will forbid my coming again. I will promise not to talk about myself next time," he said, as he turned to go down the path.

I wondered what his book was like, as I lazily watched him cross the street in the noonday sun, and then I remembered with a twinge of conscience that I had hardly written a thousand words since I came. This soft air, redolent of spicy midsummer odors, seemed to produce an invincible indolence, even of thought. After the struggles of the past winter, I was feeling the reaction in utter relaxation of will and purpose. I wondered, were I in Mr. Longworth's place, would I ever write again, from the mere love of it? Was the end, even if that end were success, worth the pain of attaining it? And then, fearing to question myself further, I went to my room and began to write.

Late July was very beautiful in Wauchittic. From the ocean, a dozen miles distant, was wafted the faintest suggestion of the odor of the sea, the wide fields of lush pasture seemed to drink the sun. All night the murmur of the little stream falling over the mill-dam, filled the dark hours with soft whispers. The low woods, with their glittering leaves of the scrub-oak, tempted me, and I discovered fairy glades in their depths, where the grass was thin and pale, and strong ferns grew about the roots of the trees. Sometimes Mr. Longworth would accompany me on my trips of exploration, and, happy in our youth and the gladness of summer, and forgetful of strict conventionality, we would spend long mornings together, writing and reading in an especially cosy spot at the

edge of the woods back of the farm. Mr. Longworth was growing so strong that Wilson's position was almost entirely a sinecure, and he spent most of his time lounging in the one village store, relating remarkable stories of New York to a circle of open-mouthed idlers. Day by day, I watched the lessening pallor and the growing health of Mr. Longworth's face, and saw him visibly gain strength. He could carry all the rugs and books and writing materials to our sylvan sanctum without fatigue, and he was so boyishly proud of his health that he used to exhaust himself with too long walks, for which I administered lectures that he always received submissively. One warm morning we had spent an hour in writing. I had grown tired, and throwing down my pen and pad, I left Mr. Longworth still at work, and strayed out into the field in the sun. There had been no rain for days, and the locusts filled the air with their _zeeing_. The wide field was dotted with golden patches of the arnica blossom, or yellow daisy, as the farmers called it. I wandered through the hot, knee-high grass, picking handfuls of the broad yellow suns, then childishly threw them away, and pulled others, with great heads of sweet red clover, and spears of timothy too. I was so happy. My whole being was filled with causeless peace and gladness. From time to time I glanced back to the shade of the oak trees, to the tall, slender figure, with the dark head bent over the white sheets of manuscript, and I sang softly a little song for very joy of my life. I looked up to the deep, cloudless sky, around at the wide stretch of green in the golden sunlight, then almost unconsciously back once more to the edge of the woods, where the spread rugs made a tiny home fit for the heart of summertide. Nor did I guess, even then, which was the dominant note of this wonderful chord that my life had unconsciously struck. I knew only that the world was far more beautiful than I had ever dreamed, and still singing under my breath the little cadence that seemed to fit the day, I wandered slowly back, leaving a path crushed between the tall, sun-faded grasses as I went.

Mr. Longworth laid down his work as I approached. A strange, absurd shyness possessed me, after the weeks of strengthening friendship and simple good-fellowship, but I held out the great bunch of daisies playfully to him, as I seated myself on the pile of rugs. He reached his hand for them eagerly, and buried his face in their sunny depths.

His eyes shone feverishly with his stress of work, and his thin cheeks were flushed. "You look tired," I said. "You should not write so long."

Thus far, though we had often jested about it, we had never read each other portions of our work.

"When I get mine half done," I had said, when he begged me to read him a chapter.

"When I can manage to make a chapter run smoothly to its end," he had

replied laughing, in turn, but now to-day, urged by some necessity for an absorbing topic into which I could plunge, losing my restlessness, I insisted that he should read fragments, at least, to me.

He demurred at first. "I have told you how stupid it sounds, these disconnected bits, little descriptions, detached conversations. Sometimes I think I shall never use them after all." He fingered the pages absently.

"No, read it to me as it is," I begged. "I must hear it. I understand, of course, how it is written."

And so, yielding to my entreaties, he read, while I leaned back against the tree trunk, listening at first critically, and interested, perhaps, because it was his work, then with clasped hands and shortening breath, leaning forward that I might lose no word. A little squirrel scampered through the undergrowth back of us, and far in another field I could hear Mr. Hopper's quavering voice, as he called to the haymakers. Sometimes a leaf rustled, falling to the ground, but it was very quiet.

At last he laid down the leaves, and fixed his dark eyes eagerly on my face, as if he would read my thoughts, but my eyes were full of tears, and they were selfish tears. "My poor book!" I said, with a tender contempt for it.

"Do you mean--?" he began incredulously.

"I mean that this is wonderful, and that I know I shall never write again," I said. "I do not know how it is, but I can read by the light of your book that you have genius, and that I am a failure. It is well that something brought it home to me before I wasted any more time." I meant to speak bravely, but I knew more than this. I knew that, with all my air-castles shattered, with the knowledge that to him literature was a pastime, while to me it meant livelihood, I gloried more in his success than I should in my own, that I was glad that he, and not I, was to have fame; and in the tumult of new emotions against which I struggled, my lip quivered, I turned aside my head, and felt, but I did not see, the hand that touched mine, thrilling me so that I drew away.

"Miss Marriott--Kate--"

"No, no," I cried, facing him with my cheeks crimson, and speaking rapidly, "I want you to let me send a few pages for a reading to Mr. ----, the editor of ----'s Magazine; he is a friend of mine; he has been so good to me. You say you have no publisher in view. I am certain he will take this when it is finished, and you know what that means; it will make your reputation, and--"

"Ah, but you see, these are only fragments," he said, sadly, regaining his composure. "Suppose I am never able to weave them properly into the plot? You cannot know how discouraged I am sometimes."

"Will you not let me send them?" I asked eagerly. "It is quite true that they are only fragments, but no one could write such things and then fail of success in elaborating; it is impossible. Come, let us go, it is nearly dinner-time," I went on, not giving him time to speak, as I began gathering up the books and rugs. "No, do not talk of my book; it is over. It was only a fancy of mine. I ought to have known I could not really write, and it came to me clearly this morning--so clearly! If you will let me be godmother to yours, that will be a little consolation," I said laughing, and having now his consent to send his MSS. to Mr. ----, I hurried him homeward, talking gaily of indifferent topics, and avoiding the tender, questioning eyes that sought my own.

That there was bitterness in the realization that I had miserably failed, that my novel was stupid and lacked the elements of interest, I cannot deny. Why I had not seen it all before, I can never understand, but this morning, as I compared it with the brilliant and strange play of fancy that characterized Mr. Longworth's work, I felt it keenly and conclusively. In the long afternoon hours I spent that day alone with my manuscript, I learned to face calmly the fact that I must go back to newspaper work without the vestige of a hope that I should ever write a readable novel. What it meant to me to arrive at this conclusion no one will understand who has not had the same hopes and the same downfall, yet through those hours in the little white-washed bed-room, with the locust boughs tapping against the window, the memory that I strenuously put away of that warm clasp, of the new tenderness in the voice that had called me by my name, softened the sharp pangs of disappointment; and he, at least, would not fail as I had done.

Toward sunset I laid away my dead book, and went down to the sitting-room where Mrs. Hopper sat placidly mending. She looked a trifle anxiously at my reddened eyelids. "Feel well?" she queried, plying the needle swiftly. "You mustn't let things prey onto your mind," she admonished, "or you won't get your money's worth of good out of the place, and besides, Lord! what is there worth worryin' over, any how? Money ain't worth it, and love ain't worth it," she declared, with a keen glance at me. "But, there, what _is_ the use of tellin anybody that? I worried some before I married Pa. I guess it's natural. I thought, thinks I, 'Mary Ann Bishop, he's years older'n you, 'n' he's weakly, 'n' there ain't much doubt but what you'll be left a relic'. Now look, that was ten years ago, and Pa ain't no more out o' slew 'n' he was then. 'N' then I thought, 'There, he's had one wife.' (Pa was a widower.) ''N' I expect he'll be always a-comparin' of us.' It ain't happened once, at least, not out loud, an' oh! how good he was to that woman! It didn't seem as if he _could_ be as good to his second. It was

all over the place," said Mrs. Hopper laying down "Pa's" calico shirt, and speaking in low and impressive tones, as befits the subject of death, "how he bought her a bran-new wig two weeks before she died, an' he let her be buried in that wig, that cost over thirty dollars! An' as for a stone! Well, there, he went over to Gilsey's marble-yard to New Sidon, 'n' picked out a sixty-dollar tomb, 'n' never asked 'm to heave off a cent! An' that man, Miss Marriott," said Mrs. Hopper, "he'd do just as well by me as ever he done by her, 'n' I'm contented, 'n' I'm happy. I can tell you, I'm a believer in marriage," she said, with a proud smile, as she rose to get tea.

Mr. Longworth brought over a neat package of manuscript that evening, which I sent, with a letter to Mr. ----. We sat talking on the porch, watching the moon rise and flood the dew-wet fields with a tide of white radiance. Occasionally we heard Mr. or Mrs. Hopper in the lamp-lit sitting-room making brief comments on neighborhood gossip, or the crops, and then Mrs. Hopper would go on silently sewing, and "Pa," his white head bent over a "Farmer's Almanac," made long and painful calculations on a scrap of paper in which he seemed to get much mysterious assistance from the almanac.

Without, the cool night air touched my face gently. My head was burning and fevered with the day's emotions, but I felt the infinite peace of the evening calming me.
==========endpart1
"No," I said firmly, "indeed I have decided wisely, Mr. Longworth. I am going back to my old work cheerfully, and shall never think again of my--my disappointment. I believe I can easily get work on my old paper, the "_Courier_," and I have been offered an editorial position on a new fashion paper, beside my weekly letter to the "_Red Cañon Gazette_.'" Naturally I did not tell him that I had spent all my savings of a year on this planned vacation, when I was to finish the book that should reimburse me.

"You shall not go back to that wretched drudgery," said Mr. Longworth, in his impetuous, nervous manner. "Do not imagine you are ever to do it again. Tell me," he said, lowering his voice, and leaning toward me so that he could see my face, shaded by the vine-hung trellis. "Could you be happy--"

We heard Mr. Hopper moving around the room uneasily, and instinctively Mr. Longworth paused.

"Ma," said the old man, a trifle reproachfully, "I'm afraid you don't try to make it cheerful for them young folks. Why don't you go out and set for a spell? I guess _I'll_ go."

"Stay where you are, Joseph," said Mrs. Hopper, in loud tones of

disapproval, that were wafted through the open window to us. "Did _we_ want the old folks forever runnin' after us before _we_ was married?" Mr. Longworth tried not to steal a mirthful glance at me, but he found it hard to resist. "Oh! pshaw, Ma," replied the old man gently. "There ain't none of that goin' on. He ain't a marryin' man," and we heard his slippered feet pattering softly over the oil-clothed entry, and his mild face beamed on us through the net door, which he held open for a moment before he came out and seated himself in the rocking-chair.

"Well, now, this _is_ comfortable," he said, with a cheerfully social air. "I can tell you this is a night for authors. Here's a chance for poetry!" with a wave of his thin, weather-worn hand toward the peaceful fields. "Made any this evenin'?" he inquired. "Ain't? well, I guess you'll never come across a more inspirin' night," he said, with some disappointment. "I expected likely you'd have some you could say right off. Fer a plain farmer, I don't s'pose there's anybody fonder'n I am of verses," he said, musingly. "I b'lieve I told ye 'twas in our family. I wish you could have met my uncle, Mis' Marriot, died on his ninety-second birthday, and had writ a long piece on each birthday for a matter of forty year. That ther man was talented, I tell ye. There wasn't no occasion he couldn't write a piece onto. Why, the night Ma and me was married (we was married in Ma's sister's parlor) we hadn't more'n turned 'round from the minister, 'n before anybody had a chance t' congratulate us, uncle, he steps right up in front of us, an' sez he:

'Now you are married, an' man an' wife
May you live happy this mortial life,
An' when your days on this earth is o'er
May you both meet together on the evergreen shore.'

"It come to him, jus' come to him that minute, like a flash," said the old man, reflectively, the pathos of his sweet, tremulous voice lending unspeakable melody to the preposterous stanza.

Mr. Hopper had evidently settled himself for the remainder of the evening, and after a time Mr. Longworth bade us good-night, and went across to the Bangs homestead.

All that night I tossed about on my uncomfortable feather-bed, or rather, when I found I could not sleep, I rose after a time, and wrapped in my dressing-gown, I sat by my tiny window, watching the shadows of the wind-blown locust-boughs on the moonlit grass below, full of the dreams which are the stuff that romances are made of, and which, though I had often used them as "material," I had never known myself before; shy and tender dreams they were, that glorified that summer night, and kept me wakeful until dawn.

The next day and the next I was ill and feverish, so ill that I could

not rise. Mr. Longworth brought for me great bunches of choice flowers, for which he must have sent Wilson to the next town of New Sidon, and a dainty basket of fruit. The third day I rose and dressed toward noon, and weak as I felt, I decided to walk down to the post-office, for I thought perhaps the air would do me good, and beside, the mail was never brought up until after dark, and I longed to find if Mr. ---- had written me as I expected, about the manuscript. I knew he would be very prompt with me.

I found several letters in the box for me, and eagerly scanning the envelopes, I discovered the well-known buff tint, with the red device of a female figure with a book clasped to the breast, that is the livery of "----'s Magazine." I tore it open, reading as I slowly walked. Mr. ---- had written as follows, in his hurried hand:

"OFFICE OF ----'s MAGAZINE.

"MY DEAR MISS MARRIOTT:

"I return the MSS. you sent us, and I have no hesitation in saying that your friend is a genius. In fact, I was so chained by the somewhat wild and singular style that I sat up most of Tuesday night to go through it myself.

"Of course in their present disconnected state, the fragments are quite unavailable to us, but when worked into a story, they ought to make a success. I hope we shall have the first reading of the completed book. I understand it is the work of a beginner, but it bears none of the marks of the novice, and I can but think we have discovered the 'coming American novelist.'

"By the way, how is your own book coming on?

"Yours in haste,

"---- ----."

I had walked on some distance from the post-office as I read this, for Mr. ----'s chirography was almost undecipherable, even to one accustomed to it. I was just folding the letter to replace it in the envelope, when I heard heavy footsteps hurrying behind me. I turned my head and saw Wilson, quite red in the face with trying to overtake me. "Beg pardon, Miss," he said, touching his hat, "I saw you coming out of the office, and--I'd like to speak to you a minute, if I may."

"What is it?" I asked, somewhat surprised. I stepped back from the path, and Wilson stooped down awkwardly, and picked a twig from a low bush

that grew by the fence. "Well," he began, drawing a long breath, "I've been thinking it over, and I've made up my mind to tell you. I expect I ought to have done it before, but my orders was so strict, and--you see I'm saving up to get married, and a man hates to lose a good place,--but that's neither here nor there, Miss, the truth is, I ain't Mr. Longworth's nurse, and I ain't his valley neither. I'm--I'm his attendant."

"Well, what of it?" I said, with some irritation. How could Wilson's absurd distinctions matter to me? What did I care whether he called himself valet, or nurse, or attendant?

To his credit, be it said that there was no tone of half-exultation, almost pardonable after my manner of annoyance, as he went on. His heavy, spatulate finger-tips were stripping the little twig bare of its leaves. As he continued, I fixed my lowered eyes on that bit of alder. I remember every tiny, bright brown knot on it, and how one worm-eaten leaf curled at its edges.

"You see," said Wilson, clumsily, "I mean I was his attendant up to the Retreat. It was a real high-toned place, and they did not take any dangerous ones, only folks like him. His people ain't the kind that stand for price. They've got plenty, and they don't care what they pay. I dare say you've been in his father's store many a time,--Longworth & Whittles, one of the biggest and best dry-goods stores on Sixth avenue. The old gentleman's rolling in gold, and there ain't a nicer lady in New York City than Mrs. Longworth. You see, it was this way. Young Mr. Longworth didn't like business, and they sent him abroad to be educated, and when he come back he just fooled around and went out a good deal, and finally, he got in with some literary folks. One of his friends took him to their receptions, and he got it into his head he was going to be a writer. His folks didn't care, they'd have paid a publisher any price to take his books if it would have done any good; but finally he took to shuttin' himself up in his room day and night, writin' all the time, and it told on him pretty well, for I guess he'd never wrote anything but cheques before. And then he'd burn it up as fast as he wrote, and not eat, and not come out o' that room for days at a time. He kept a-saying it would be all right if it would only fit together but that's just where it is, it don't any of it fit together. And now he just writes over and over the same things he wrote a year ago. He don't know it, he burns 'em up, and then he thinks it's all different. He got so bad the doctors said he'd be better up to Dr. Balsam's Retreat, where they could kind of soothe him down, and make him think his health was out of order, and get his mind off his writing, but he did have a pretty bad fever up there, an' ever since he thinks he was editor or somethin' on some paper, and he can tell it off straight as a string. He's all right about everything else, and if you didn't know about it, you'd think he was just what he says, sure enough."

"It's pretty near killed his mother. Seems funny; a young fellow with nothing to do but spend money, getting it into his head to write books! Well, they said I wasn't to tell anybody, and I _ain't_ told anybody but you, and I thought as you was a writer, and pretty busy, I guessed you wouldn't want to waste your time over his book. They say, folks do, that it's first-rate, as far as it goes; but you see it don't never get any farther, and it never will. I thought I'd better tell you about it," said Wilson, his plebeian, kindly face crimson with a delicate pity that would have done honor to an aristocrat, and still working assiduously at the little twig, "I knew you was a genuine writer yourself, and it seemed a pity for you to take up your valuable time helpin' him on, about something that can't amount to anything."

May he be forgiven that gentle falsehood!

I looked for a moment at the wide-spread field and distant woodland, lying green in the peaceful sunshine, at the place grown so dear to me, that now whirled before my eyes. Far down the road a heavy farm-wagon creaked its way toward us, in a cloud of white dust.

"You did quite right to tell me, Wilson," I said, turning to go. "No one shall hear of it from me."

I looked down at the buff envelope from "----'s Magazine," which I had crushed in my hand, and smoothed it out mechanically, as I went on in the increasing heat.

It was only August, but my summer was over.



THE LADY RUSTIC

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Queen of Spades and other stories*, by Alexander Pushkin

In one of our distant provinces was the estate of Ivan Petrovitch Berestoff. As a youth he served in the guards, but having left the army early in 1797 he retired to his country seat and there remained. He married a wife from among the poor nobility, and when she died in childbed he happened to be detained on farming business in one of his distant fields. His daily occupations soon brought him consolation. He built a house on his own plan, set up his own cloth factory, became his own auditor and accountant, and began to think himself the cleverest fellow in the whole district. The neighbours who used to come to him upon a visit and bring their families and dogs took good care not to contradict him. His work-a-day dress was a short coat of velveteen; on holidays he wore a frock-coat of cloth from his own factory. His accounts took most of his time, and he read nothing but the _Senatorial News_. On the whole, though he was considered proud, he was not disliked. The only person who could never get on with him was his nearest neighbour, Grigori Ivanovitch Muromsky. A true Russian _barin,_ he had squandered in Moscow a large part of his estate, and having lost his wife as well as his money he had retired to his sole remaining property, and there continued his extragavance but in a different way. He set up an English garden on which he spent nearly all the income he had left. His grooms wore English liveries. An English governess taught his daughter. He farmed his land upon the English system. But foreign farming grows no Russian corn.

So, in spite of his retirement, the income of Grigori Ivanovitch did not increase. Even in the country he had a faculty for making new debts. But he was no fool, people said, for was he not the first landowner in all that province to mortgage his property to the government--a process then generally believed to be one of great complexity and risk? Among his detractors Berestoff, a thorough hater of innovation, was the most severe. In speaking of his neighbour's Anglo-mania he could scarcely keep his feelings under control, and missed no opportunity for criticism. To some compliment from a visitor to his estate he would answer, with a knowing smile:

"Yes, my farming is not like that of Grigori Ivanovitch. I can't afford to ruin my land on the English system, but I am satisfied to escape starvation on the Russian."

Obliging neighbours reported these and other jokes to Grigori, with additions and commentaries of their own. The Anglo-maniac was as irritable as a journalist under this criticism, and wrathfully referred to his critic as a bumpkin and a bear.

Relations were thus strained when Berestoff's son came home. Having finished his university career, he wanted to go into the army; but his father objected. For the civil service young Berestoff had no taste. Neither would yield, so young Alexis took up the life of a country gentleman, and to be ready for emergencies cultivated a moustache. He was really a handsome fellow, and it would indeed have been a pity never to pinch his fine figure into a military uniform, and instead of displaying his broad shoulders on horseback to round them over an office desk. Ever foremost in the hunting-field, and a straight rider, it was quite clear, declared the neighbours, that he could never make a good official. The shy young ladies glanced and the bold stared at him in admiration; but he took no notice of them, and each could only attribute his indifference to some prior attachment. In fact, there was in private circulation, copied from an envelope in his handwriting, this address:

A. N. P.,
Care of Akulina Petrovna Kurotchkina,
Opposite Alexeieff Monastery.

Those readers who have not seen our country life can hardly realize the charm of these provincial girls. Breathing pure air under the shadow of their apple trees, their only knowledge of the world is drawn from books. In solitude and unrestrained, their feelings and their passions develop early to a degree unknown to the busier beauties of our towns. For them the tinkling of a bell is an event, a drive into the nearest town an epoch, and a chance visit a long, sometimes an everlasting remembrance. At their oddities he may laugh who will, but superficial sneers cannot impair their real merits--their individuality, which, so says Jean Paul, is a necessary element of greatness. The women in large towns may be better educated, but the levelling influence of the world soon makes all women as much alike as their own head-dresses.

Let not this be regarded as condemnation. Still as an ancient writer says _nota nostra manet._

It may be imagined what an impression Alexis made on our country misses. He was the first gloomy and disenchanted hero they had ever beheld; the first who ever spoke to them of vanished joys and blighted past. Besides, he wore a black ring with a death's head on it. All this was quite a new thing in that province, and the young ladies all went crazy.

But she in whose thoughts he dwelt most deeply was Lisa, or, as the old Anglo-maniac called her, Betty, the daughter of Grigori Ivanovitch. Their fathers did not visit, so she had never seen Alexis, who was the sole topic of conversation among her young neighbours. She was

just seventeen, with dark eyes lighting up her pretty face. An only, and consequently a spoilt child, full of life and mischief, she was the delight of her father, and the distraction of her governess, Miss Jackson, a prim spinster in the forties, who powdered her face and blackened her eyebrows, read Pamela twice a year, drew a salary of 2,000 rubles, and was nearly bored to death in barbarous Russia.

Lisa's maid Nastia was older, but quite as flighty as her mistress, who was very fond of her, and had her as confidante in all her secrets and as fellow-conspirator in her mischief.

In fact, no leading lady played half such an important part in French tragedy as was played by Nastia in the village.

Said Nastia, while dressing her young lady:

"May I go to-day and visit a friend?"

"Yes. Where?"

"To the Berestoff's. It is the cook's namesday. He called yesterday to ask us to dinner."

"Then," said Lisa, "the masters quarrel and the servants entertain one another."

"And what does that matter to us?" said Nastia. "I belong to you and not to your father. You have not quarrelled with young Berestoff yet. Let the old people fight if they please."

"Nastia! try and see Alexei Berestoff. Come back and tell me all about him."

Nastia promised; Lisa spent the whole day impatiently waiting for her. In the evening she returned.

"Well, Lisaveta Grigorievna!" she said, as she entered the room.

"I have seen young Berestoff. I had a good look at him. We spent the whole day together."

"How so? tell me all about it."

"Certainly? We started, I and Anissia----"

"Yes, yes, I know! What then?"

"I would rather tell you in proper order. We were just in time for

dinner; the room was quite full. There were the Zaharievskys, the steward's wife and daughters, the Shlupinskys----"

"Yes, yes! And Berestoff?"

"Wait a bit. We sat down to dinner. The steward's wife had the seat of honour; I sat next to her, and her daughters were huffy; but what do I care!"

"Oh, Nastia! How tiresome you are with these everlasting details!"

"How impatient you are! Well, then we rose from table--we had been sitting for about three hours and it was a splendid dinner-party, blue, red and striped creams--then we went into the garden to play at kiss-in-the-ring when the young gentleman appeared."

"Well, is it true? Is he so handsome?"

"Wonderfully handsome! I may say beautiful. Tall, stately, with a lovely colour."

"Really! I thought his face was pale. Well, how did he strike you--Was he melancholy and thoughtful?"

"Oh, no! I never saw such a mad fellow. He took it into his head to join us at kiss-in-the-ring." "He played at kiss-in-the-ring! It is impossible."

"No, it's very possible; and what more do you think? When he caught any one he kissed her." "Of course you may tell lies if you like, Nastia."

"As you please, miss, only I am not lying. I could scarcely get away from him. Indeed he spent the whole day with us."

"Why do people say then that he is in love and looks at nobody?"

"I am sure I don't know, miss. He looked too much at me and Tania too, the steward's daughter, and at Pasha too. In fact, he neglected nobody. He is such a wild fellow!"

"This is surprising; and what do the servants say about him?"

"They say he is a splendid gentleman--so kind, so lively! He has only one fault: he is too fond of the girls. But I don't think that is such a great fault. He will get steadier in time."

"How I should like to see him," said Lisa, with a sigh.

"And why can't you? Tugilovo is only a mile off. Take a walk in that direction, or a ride, and you are sure to meet him. He shoulders his gun and goes shooting every morning."

"No, it would never do. He would think I was running after him. Besides, our fathers have quarrelled, so he and I could hardly set up a friendship. Oh, Nastia! I know what I'll do. I will dress up like a peasant."

"That will do. Put on a coarse chemise and a _sarafan_, and set out boldly for Tugilovo. Berestoff will never miss you I promise you."

"I can talk like a peasant splendidly. Oh, Nastia, dear Nastia, what a happy thought!" and Lisa went to bed resolved to carry out her plan. Next day she made her preparations. She went to the market for some coarse linen, some dark blue stuff, and some brass buttons, and out of these Nastia and she cut a chemise and a _sarafan._ All the maid-servants were set down to sew, and by evening everything was ready.

As she tried on her new costume before the glass, Lisa said to herself that she had never looked so nice. Then she began to rehearse her meeting with Alexis. First she gave him a low bow as she passed along, then she continued to nod her head like a mandarin. Next she addressed him in a peasant _patois,_ simpering and shyly hiding her face behind her sleeve. Nastia gave the performance her full approval. But there was one difficulty. She tried to cross the yard barefooted, but the grass stalks pricked her tender feet and the gravel caused intolerable pain. Nastia again came to the rescue.

She took the measure of Lisa's foot and hurried across the fields to the herdsman Trophim, of whom she ordered a pair of bark shoes.

The next morning before daylight Lisa awoke. The whole household was still asleep. Nastia was at the gate waiting for the herdsman; soon the sound of his horn drew near, and the village herd straggled past the Manor gates. After them came Trophim, who, as he passed, handed to Nastia a little pair of speckled bark shoes, and received a ruble.

Lisa, who had quietly donned her peasant dress, whispered to Nastia her last instructions about Miss Jackson; then she went through the kitchen, out of the back door, into the open field, then she began to run.

Dawn was breaking, and the rows of golden clouds stood like courtiers waiting for their monarch. The clear sky, the fresh morning air, the dew, the breeze and singing of the birds filled Lisa's heart with child-like joy.

Fearing to meet with some acquaintance, she did nor walk but flew. As she drew near the wood where lay the boundary of her father's property she slackened her pace. It was here she was to meet Alexis. Her heart beat violently, she knew not why. The terrors of our youthful escapades are their chief charm.

Lisa stepped forward into the darkness of the wood; its hollow echoes bade her welcome. Her buoyant spirits gradually gave place to meditation. She thought--but who shall truly tell the thoughts of sweet seventeen in a wood, alone, at six o'clock on a spring morning?

And as she walked in meditation under the shade of lofty trees, suddenly a beautiful pointer began to bark at her. Lisa cried out with fear, and at the same moment a voice exclaimed, "_Tout beau Shogar, ici,_" and a young sportsman stepped from behind the bushes. "Don't be afraid, my dear, he won't bite."

Lisa had already recovered from her fright, and instantly took advantage of the situation.

"It's all very well, sir," she said, with assumed timidity and shyness, _"I_ am afraid of him, he seems such a savage creature, and may fly at me again."

Alexis, whom the reader has already recognised, looked steadily at the young peasant. "I will escort you, if you are afraid; will you allow me to walk by your side?"

"Who is to prevent you?" replied Lisa. "A freeman can do as he likes, and the road is public!"

"Where do you come from?"

"From Prilutchina; I am the daughter of Yassili, the blacksmith, and I am looking for mushrooms." She was carrying a basket suspended from her shoulders by a cord.

"And you, _barin_; are you from Tugilovo?"

"Exactly, I am the young gentleman's valet" (he wished to equalize their ranks). But Lisa looked at him and laughed.

"Ah! you are lying," she said. "I am not a fool. I see you are the master himself."

"What makes you think so?"

"Everything."

"Still----?"

"How can one help it. You are not dressed like a servant. You speak differently. You even call your dog in a foreign tongue."

Lisa charmed him more and more every moment. Accustomed to be unceremonious with pretty country girls, he tried to kiss her, but Lisa jumped aside, and suddenly assumed so distant and severe an air that though it amused him he did not attempt any further familiarities.

"If you wish to remain friends," she said, with dignity, "do not forget yourself."

"Who has taught you this wisdom?" asked Alexis, with a laugh. "Can it be my little friend Nastia, your mistress's maid? So this is how civilization spreads."

Lisa felt she had almost betrayed herself, and said, "Do you think I have never been up to the Manor House? I have seen and heard more than you think. Still, chattering here with you won't get me mushrooms. You go that way, _barin_; I'll go the other, begging your pardon;" and Lisa made as if to depart, but Alexis held her by the hand.

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Akulina," she said, struggling to get her fingers free. "Let me go, _barin,_ it is time for me to be home."

"Well, my friend Akulina, I shall certainly call on your father, Yassili, the blacksmith."

"For the Lord's sake don't do that. If they knew at home I had been talking here alone with the young _barin,_ I should catch it. My father would beat me within an inch of my life."

"Well, I must see you again."

"I will come again some other day for mushrooms."

"When?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

"My dear Akulina, I would kiss you if I dared. To-morrow, then, at the same time; that is a bargain."

"All right."

"You will not play me false?"

"No."

"Swear it."

"By the Holy Friday, then, I will come."

The young couple parted. Lisa ran out of the wood across the fields, stole into the garden, and rushed headlong into the farmyard, where Nastia was waiting for her. Then she changed her dress, answering at random the impatient questions of her _confidante_, and went into the dining-room to find the cloth laid and breakfast ready. Miss Jackson, freshly powdered and Jaced, until she looked like a wine glass, was cutting thin slices of bread and butter. Her father complimented Lisa on her early walk.

"There is no healthier habit," he remarked, "than to rise at daybreak." He quoted from the English papers several cases of longevity, adding that all centenarians had abstained from spirits, and made it a practice to rise at daybreak winter and summer. Lisa did not prove an attentive listener. She was repeating in her mind the details of her morning's interview, and as she recalled Akulina's conversation with the young sportsman her conscience smote her. In vain she assured herself that the bounds of decorum had not been passed. This joke, she argued, could have no evil consequences, but conscience would not be quieted. What most disturbed her was her promise to repeat the meeting. She half decided not to keep her word, but then Alexis, tired of waiting, might go to seek the blacksmiths daughter in the village and find the real Akulina--a stout, pockmarked girl--and so discover the hoax. Alarmed at this she determined to re-enact the part of Akulina. Alexis was enchanted. All day he thought about his new acquaintance and at night he dreamt of her. It was scarcely dawn when he was up and dressed. Without waiting even to load his gun he set out followed by the faithful Shogar, and ran to the meeting place. Half an hour passed in undeniable delay. At last he caught a glimpse of a blue _sarafan_ among the bushes and rushed to meet dear Akulina. She smiled to see his eagerness; but he saw traces of anxiety and melancholy on her face. He asked her the cause, and she at last confessed. She had been flighty and was very sorry for it. She had meant not to keep her promise, and this meeting at any rate must be the last. She begged him not to seek to continue an acquaintance which could have no good end. All this, of course, was said in peasant dialect; but the thought and feeling struck Alexis as unusual in a peasant. In eloquent words he urged her to abandon this cruel resolution. She should have no reason for

repentance; he would obey her in everything, if only she would not rob him of his one happiness and let him see her alone three times or even only twice a week. He spoke with passion, and at the moment he was really in love. Lisa listened to him in silence.

"Promise," she said, "to seek no other meetings with me but those which I myself appoint."

He was about to swear by the Holy Friday when she stopped him with a smile.

"I do not want you to swear. Your word is enough."

Then together they wandered talking in the wood, till Lisa said:

"It is time."

They parted; and Alexis was left to wonder how in two meetings a simple rustic had gained such influence over him. There was a freshness and novelty about it all that charmed him, and though the conditions she imposed were irksome, the thought of breaking his promise never even entered his mind. After all, in spite of his fatal ring and the mysterious correspondence, Alexis was a kind and affectionate youth, with a pure heart still capable of innocent enjoyment. Did I consult only my own wishes I should dwell at length on the meetings of these young people, their growing love, their mutual trust, and all they did and all they said. But my pleasure I know would not be shared by the majority of my readers; so for their sake I will omit them. I will only say that in a brief two months Alexis was already madly in love, and Lisa, though more reticent than he was, not indifferent. Happy in the present they took little thought for the future. Visions of indissoluble ties flitted not seldom through the minds of both. But neither mentioned them. For Alexis, however strong his attachment to Akulina, could not forget the social distance that was between them, while Lisa, knowing the enmity between their fathers, dared not count on their becoming reconciled. Besides, her vanity was stimulated by the vague romantic hope of at last seeing the lord of Tugilovo at the feet of the daughter of a village blacksmith. Suddenly something happened which came near to change the course of their true love. One of those cold bright mornings so common in our Russian autumns Ivan Berestoff came a-riding. For all emergencies he brought with him six pointers and a dozen beaters. That same morning Grigori Muromsky, tempted by the fine weather, saddled his English mare and came trotting through his agricultural estates. Nearing the wood he came upon his neighbour proudly seated in the saddle wearing his fur-lined overcoat. Ivan Berestoff was waiting for the hare which the beaters were driving with discordant noises out of the brushwood. If Muromsky could have foreseen this meeting he would have avoided it. But finding himself suddenly

within pistol-shot there was no escape. Like a cultivated European gentleman, Muromsky rode up to and addressed his enemy politely. Berestoff answered with the grace of a chained bear dancing to the order of his keeper. At this moment out shot the hare and scudded across the field. Berestoff and his groom shouted to loose the dogs, and started after them full speed. Muromsky's mare took fright and bolted. Her rider, who often boasted of his horsemanship, gave her her head and chuckled inwardly over this opportunity of escaping a disagreeable companion. But the mare coming at a gallop to an unseen ditch swerved. Muromsky lost his seat, fell rather heavily on the frozen ground, and lay there cursing the animal, which, sobered by the loss of her master, stopped at once. Berestoff galloped to the rescue, asking if Muromsky was hurt. Meanwhile the groom led up the culprit by the bridle. Berestoff helped Muromsky into the saddle and then invited him to his house. Peeling himself under an obligation Muromsky could not refuse, and so Berestoff returned in glory, having killed the hare and bringing home with him his adversary wounded and almost a prisoner of war.

At breakfast the neighbours fell into rather friendly conversation; Muromsky asked Berestoff to lend him a droshky, confessing that his fall made it too painful for him to ride back. Berestoff accompanied him to the outer gate, and before the leavetaking was over Muromsky Pad obtained from him a promise to come and bring Alexis to a friendly dinner at Prelutchina next day. So this old enmity which seemed before so deeply rooted was on the point of ending because the little mare had taken fright.

Lisa ran to meet Per father on his return.

"What has happened, papa?" she asked in astonishment. "Why are you limping? Where is the mare? Whose droshki is this?"

"My dear, you will never guess;"--and then he told Per.

Lisa could not believe Per ears. Before she Pad time to collect herself she heard that to-morrow both the Berestoffs would come to dinner.

"What do you say?" she exclaimed, turning pale. "The Berestoffs, father and son! Dine with us to-morrow! No, papa, you can do as you please, I certainly do not appear."

"Why? Are you mad? Since when have you become so shy? Have you imbibed hereditary hatred like a heroine of romance? Come, don't be afoot."

"No, papa, nothing on earth shall induce me to meet the Berestoffs."

Her father shrugged his shoulders, and left off arguing. He knew he

could not prevail with her by opposition, so he went to bed after his memorable ride. Lisa, too, went to her room, and summoned Nastia. Long did they discuss the coming visit. What will Alexis think on recognising in the cultivated young lady his Akulina? What opinion will he form as to her behaviour and her sense? On the other hand, Lisa was very curious to see how such an unexpected meeting would affect him. Then an idea struck her. She told it to Nastia, and with rejoicing they determined to carry it into effect.

Next morning at breakfast Muromsky asked his daughter whether she still meant to hide from the Berestoffs.

"Papa," she answered, "I will receive them if you wish it, on one condition. However I may appear before them, whatever I may do, you must promise me not to be angry, and you must show no surprise or disapproval."

"At your tricks again!" exclaimed Muromsky, laughing. "Well, well, I consent; do as you please, my black-eyed mischief." With these words he kissed her forehead, and Lisa ran off to make her preparations.

Punctually at two, six horses, drawing the home-made carriage, drove into the courtyard, and skirted the circle of green turf that formed its centre.

Old Berestoff, helped by two of Muromsky's servants in livery, mounted the steps. His son followed immediately on horseback, and the two together entered the dining-room, where the table was already laid.

Muromsky gave his guests a cordial welcome, and proposing a tour of inspection of the garden and live stock before dinner, led them along his well-swept gravel paths.

Old Berestoff secretly deplored the time and trouble wasted on such a useless whim as this Anglo-mania, but politeness forbade him to express his feelings.

His son shared neither the disapproval of the careful farmer, nor the enthusiasm of the complacent Anglo-maniac. He impatiently awaited the appearance of his hosts daughter, of whom he had often heard; for, though his heart as we know was no longer free, a young and unknown beauty might still claim his interest.

When they had come back and were all seated in the drawing-room, the old men talked over bygone days, re-telling the stories of the mess-room, while Alexis considered what attitude he should assume towards Lisa. He decided upon a cold preoccupation as most suitable, and arranged accordingly.

The door opened, he turned his head round with indifference--with such proud indifference--that the heart of the most hardened coquette must have quivered. Unfortunately there came in not Lisa but elderly Miss Jackson, whitened, laced in, with downcast eyes and her little curtsey, and Alexis' magnificent military movement failed. Before he could reassemble his scattered forces the door opened again and this time entered Lisa. All rose, Muromsky began the introductions, but suddenly stopped and bit his lip. Lisa, his dark Lisa, was painted white up to her ears, and pencilled worse than Miss Jackson herself. She wore false fair ringlets, puffed out like a Louis XIV. wig; her sleeves _à l'imbécille_ extended like the hoops of Madame de Pompadour. Her figure was laced in like a letter X, and all those of her mother's diamonds which had escaped the pawnbroker sparkled on her fingers, neck, and ears. Alexis could not discover in this ridiculous young lady his Akulina. His father kissed her hand, and he, much to his annoyance, had to do the same. As he touched her little white fingers they seemed to tremble. He noticed, too, a tiny foot intentionally displayed and shod in the most coquettish of shoes. This reconciled him a little to the rest of her attire. The white paint and black pencilling--to tell the truth--in his simplicity he did not notice at first, nor indeed afterwards.

Grigori Muromsky, remembering his promise, tried not to show surprise; for the rest, he was so much amused at his daughter's mischief, that he could scarcely keep his countenance. For the prim Englishwoman, however, it was no laughing matter. She guessed that the white and black paint had been abstracted from her drawer, and a red patch of indignation shone through the artificial whiteness of her face. Flaming glances shot from her eyes at the young rogue, who, reserving all explanation for the future, pretended not to notice them. They sat down to table, Alexis continuing his performance as an absent-minded pensive man. Lisa was all affectation. She minced her words, drawled, and would speak only in French. Her father glanced at her from time to time, unable to divine her object, but he thought it all a great joke. The Englishwoman fumed, but said nothing. Ivan Berestoff alone felt at his ease. He ate for two, drank his fill, and as the meal went on became more and more friendly, and laughed louder and louder.

At last they rose from the table. The guests departed and Muromsky gave vent to his mirth and curiosity.

"What made you play such tricks upon them?" he inquired. "Do you know, Lisa, that white paint really becomes you? I do not wish to pry into the secrets of a lady's toilet, but if I were you I should always paint, not too much, of course, but a little."

Lisa was delighted with her success. She kissed her father, promised

to consider his suggestion, and ran off to propitiate the enraged Miss Jackson, whom she could scarcely prevail upon to open the door and hear her excuses.

Lisa was ashamed, she said, to show herself before the visitors--such a blackamoor. She had not dared to ask; she knew dear kind Miss Jackson would forgive her.

Miss Jackson, persuaded that her pupil had not meant to ridicule her, became pacified, kissed Lisa, and in token of forgiveness presented her with a little pot of English white, which the latter, with expressions of deep gratitude, accepted.

Next morning, as the reader will have guessed, Lisa hastened to the meeting in the wood.

"You were yesterday at our master's, sir?" she began to Alexis. "What did you think of our young lady?"

Alexis answered that he had not observed her.

"That is a pity."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to ask you if what they say is true."

"What do they say?"

"That I resemble our young lady; do you think so?"

"What nonsense, she is a deformity beside you!"

"Oh! _barin,_ it is a sin of you to say so. Our young lady is so fair, so elegant! How can I vie with her?"

Alexis vowed that she was prettier than all imaginable fair young ladies, and to appease her thoroughly, began describing her young lady so funnily that Lisa burst into a hearty laugh.

"Still," she said, with a sigh, "though she may be ridiculous, yet by her side I am an illiterate fool."

"Well, that _is_ a thing to worry yourself about. If you like I will teach you to read at once."

"Are you in earnest, shall I really try?"

"If you like, my darling, we will begin at once."

They sat down. Alexis produced a pencil and note-book, and Akulina proved astonishingly quick in learning the alphabet. Alexis wondered at her intelligence. At their next meeting she wished to learn to write. The pencil at first would not obey her, but in a few minutes she could trace the letters pretty well.

"How wonderfully we get on, faster than by the Lancaster method."

Indeed, at the third lesson Akulina could read words of even three syllables, and the intelligent remarks with which she interrupted the lessons fairly astonished Alexis. As for writing she covered a whole page with aphorisms, taken from the story she had been reading. A week passed and they had begun a correspondence. Their post-office was the trunk of an old oak, and Nastia secretly played the part of postman. Thither Alexis would bring his letters, written in a large round hand, and there he found the letters of his beloved scrawled on coarse blue paper. Akulina's style was evidently improving, and her mind clearly was developing under cultivation.

Meanwhile the new-made acquaintance between Berestoff and Muromsky grew stronger, soon it became friendship. Muromsky often reflected that on the death of old Berestoff his property would come to Alexis, who would then be one of the richest landowners in that province. Why should he not marry Lisa? Old Berestoff, on the other hand, though he looked on his neighbour as a lunatic, did not deny that he possessed many excellent qualities, among them a certain cleverness. Muromsky was related to Count Pronsky, a distinguished and influential man. The count might be very useful to Alexis, and Muromsky (so thought Berestoff) would probably be glad to marry his daughter so well. Both the old men pondered all this so thoroughly that at last they broached the subject, confabulated, embraced, and severally began a plan of campaign. Muromsky foresaw one difficulty--how to persuade his Betty to make the better acquaintance of Alexis, whom she had never seen since the memorable dinner. They hardly seemed to suit each other well. At any rate Alexis had not renewed his visit to Prelutchina. Whenever old Berestoff called Lisa made a point of retreating to her own room.

"But," thought Muromsky, "if Alexis called every day Betty could not help falling in love with him. That is the way to manage it. Time will settle everything."

Berestoff troubled himself less about his plans. That same evening he called his son into his study, lit his pipe, and, after a short silence, began:

"You have not spoken about the army lately, Alexis. Has the Hussar

uniform lost its attraction for you?"

"No, father," he replied respectfully. "I know you do not wish me to join the Hussars. It is my duty to consult your wishes."

"I am pleased to find you such an obedient son, still I do not wish to force your inclinations. I will not insist upon your entering the Civil Service at once; and in the meantime I mean to marry you."

"To whom, father?" exclaimed his astonished son.

"To Lisa Muromskaia; she is good enough for any one, isn't she?"

"Father, I did not think of marrying just yet."

"Perhaps not, but I have thought about it for you."

"As you please, but I don't care about Lisa Muromskaia at all."

"You will care about her afterwards. You will get used to her, and you will learn to love her."

"I feel I could not make her happy."

"You need not trouble yourself about that. All you have to do is to respect the wishes of your father."

"I do not wish to marry, and I won't."

"You shall marry or I will curse you; and, by Heaven, I will sell and squander my property, and not leave you a farthing! I will give you three days for reflection, and, in the meanwhile, do not dare to show your face in my presence."

Alexis knew that when his father took a thing into his head nothing could knock it out again; but then Alexis was as obstinate as his father. He went to his room and there reflected upon the limits of parental authority, on Lisa Muromskaia, his father's threat to make him a beggar, and finally he thought of Akulina.

For the first time he clearly saw how much he loved her. The romantic idea of marrying a peasant girl and working for a living came into his mind; and the more he thought of it, the more he approved it. Their meetings in the wood had been stopped of late by the wet weather.

He wrote to Akulina in the roundest hand and the maddest style, telling her of his impending ruin, and asking her to be his wife. He took the letter at once to the tree trunk, dropped it in, and went much

satisfied with himself to bed.

Next morning, firm in resolution, he started early to call on Muromsky and explain the situation. He meant to win him over by appealing to his generosity.

"Is Mr. Muromsky at home?" he asked reining up his horse at the porch.

"No, sir, Mr. Muromsky went out early this morning."

How provoking, thought Alexis.

"Well, is Miss Lisa at home?"

"Yes, sir."

And throwing the reins to the footman, Alexis leapt from his horse and entered unannounced.

"It will soon be over," he thought, going towards the drawing-room. "I will explain to Miss Muromsky herself." He entered ... and was transfixed. Lisa!... no, Akulina, dear, dark Akulina, wearing no _sarafan_ but a white morning frock, sat by the window reading his letter. So intent was she upon it that she did not hear him enter. Alexis could not repress a cry of delight. Lisa started, raised her hand, cried out, and attempted to run away. He rushed to stop her. "Akulina! Akulina!" Lisa tried to free herself.

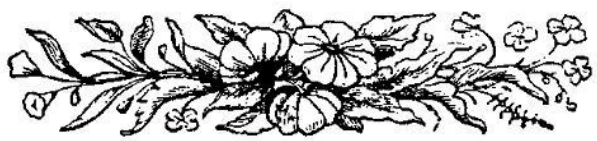
"_Mais laissez moi donc, Monsieur! mais êtes vous fou?_" she repeated, turning away.

"Akulina! my darling Akulina!" he repeated, kissing her hand.

Miss Jackson, who was an eye-witness of this scene, knew not what to think. The door opened and Grigori Muromsky entered.

"Ah!" cried he, "you seem to have settled things between you."...

The reader will excuse me the unnecessary trouble of winding up.



THE BRACELET

WHEN I tie about thy wrist,
Julia, this my silken twist,
For what other reason is't

But to show thee how, in part,
Thou my pretty captive art?
—But thy bond-slave is my heart.

'Tis but silk that bindeth thee,
Snap the thread, and thou art free;
But 'tis otherwise with me:

I am bound, and fast bound, so
That from thee I cannot go:
If I could I would not so!
Robert Herrick.

AN INVITATION

TELL me, pretty one, where will you sail?
How shall our bark be steered, I pray?
Breezes flutter each silken veil,
Tell me, where will you go to-day?

My vessel's helm is of ivory white,
Her bulwarks glisten with jewels bright
And red gold;
The sails are made from the wings of a dove,
And the man at the wheel is the god of love,
Blithe and bold.

Where shall we sail? 'Mid the Baltic's foam?
Or over the broad Pacific roam?
Don't refuse.
Say, shall we gather the sweet snow-flowers,
Or wander in rose-strewn Eastern bowers?
Only choose.

"Oh, carry me then," cried the fair coquette,
"To the land where never I've journeyed yet,
To that shore
Where love is lasting, and change unknown,

And a man is faithful to one alone
Evermore.”

Go, seek that land for a year and a day,
At the end of the time you’ll be still far away
Pretty maid;—
’Tis a country unlettered in map or in chart,
’Tis a country that does not exist, sweetheart,
I’m afraid!
Translated from Théophile Gautier.

AN AMERICAN GIRL

SHE’S had a Vassar education,
And points with pride to her degrees;
She’s studied household decoration:
She knows a dado from a frieze,
And tells Corots from Boldonis;
A Jacquemart etching, or a Haden,
A Whistler, too, perchance might please
A free and frank young Yankee maiden.

She does not care for meditation;
Within her bonnet are no bees;
She has a gentle animation,
She joins in singing simple glees.
She tries no trills, no rivalries
With Lucca (now Baronin Raden),
With Nilsson or with Gerster; she’s
A free and frank young Yankee maiden.

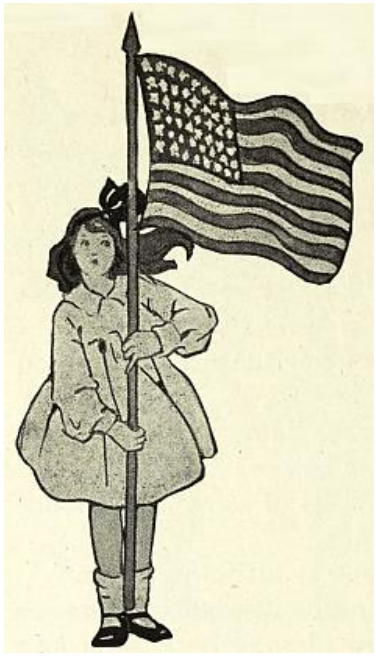
I’m blessed above the whole creation,
Far, far, above all other he’s;
I ask you for congratulation
On this the best of jubilees:
I go with her across the seas
Unto what Poe would call an Aiden,—
I hope no servant’s there to tease
A free and frank young Yankee maiden.

ENVOY

Princes, to you the western breeze

Bears many a ship and heavy laden,
What is the best we send in these?
A free and frank young Yankee maiden.
Brander Matthews.

All from:
The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Vers de Société Anthology*, by Various



MELLONTA TAUTA

From: Project Gutenberg's *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume 4*

TO THE EDITORS OF THE LADY'S BOOK:

I have the honor of sending you, for your magazine, an article which I hope you will be able to comprehend rather more distinctly than I do myself. It is a translation, by my friend, Martin Van Buren Mavis, (sometimes called the "Poughkeepsie Seer") of an odd-looking MS. which I found, about a year ago, tightly corked up in a jug floating in the Mare Tenebrarum--a sea well described by the Nubian geographer, but seldom visited now-a-days, except for the transcendentalists and divers for crotchets.

Truly yours,

EDGAR A. POE

{this paragraph not in the volume--ED}

ON BOARD BALLOON "SKYLARK"

April, 1, 2848

NOW, my dear friend--now, for your sins, you are to suffer the infliction of a long gossiping letter. I tell you distinctly that I am going to punish you for all your impertinences by being as tedious, as discursive, as incoherent and as unsatisfactory as possible. Besides, here I am, cooped up in a dirty balloon, with some one or two hundred of the canaille, all bound on a pleasure excursion, (what a funny idea some people have of pleasure!) and I have no prospect of touching terra firma for a month at least. Nobody to talk to. Nothing to do. When one has nothing to do, then is the time to correspond with ones friends. You perceive, then, why it is that I write you this letter--it is on account of my ennui and your sins.

Get ready your spectacles and make up your mind to be annoyed. I mean to write at you every day during this odious voyage.

Heigho! when will any Invention visit the human pericranium? Are we forever to be doomed to the thousand inconveniences of the balloon? Will nobody contrive a more expeditious mode of progress? The jog-trot movement, to my thinking, is little less than positive torture. Upon my word we have not made more than a hundred miles the hour since leaving home! The very birds beat us--at least some of them. I assure you that I do not exaggerate at all. Our motion, no doubt, seems slower than it actually is--this on account of our having no objects about us by which

to estimate our velocity, and on account of our going with the wind. To be sure, whenever we meet a balloon we have a chance of perceiving our rate, and then, I admit, things do not appear so very bad. Accustomed as I am to this mode of travelling, I cannot get over a kind of giddiness whenever a balloon passes us in a current directly overhead. It always seems to me like an immense bird of prey about to pounce upon us and carry us off in its claws. One went over us this morning about sunrise, and so nearly overhead that its drag-rope actually brushed the network suspending our car, and caused us very serious apprehension. Our captain said that if the material of the bag had been the trumpery varnished "silk" of five hundred or a thousand years ago, we should inevitably have been damaged. This silk, as he explained it to me, was a fabric composed of the entrails of a species of earth-worm. The worm was carefully fed on mulberries--kind of fruit resembling a water-melon--and, when sufficiently fat, was crushed in a mill. The paste thus arising was called papyrus in its primary state, and went through a variety of processes until it finally became "silk." Singular to relate, it was once much admired as an article of female dress! Balloons were also very generally constructed from it. A better kind of material, it appears, was subsequently found in the down surrounding the seed-vessels of a plant vulgarly called euphorbium, and at that time botanically termed milk-weed. This latter kind of silk was designated as silk-buckingham, on account of its superior durability, and was usually prepared for use by being varnished with a solution of gum caoutchouc--a substance which in some respects must have resembled the gutta percha now in common use. This caoutchouc was occasionally called Indian rubber or rubber of twist, and was no doubt one of the numerous fungi. Never tell me again that I am not at heart an antiquarian.

Talking of drag-ropes--our own, it seems, has this moment knocked a man overboard from one of the small magnetic propellers that swarm in ocean below us--a boat of about six thousand tons, and, from all accounts, shamefully crowded. These diminutive barques should be prohibited from carrying more than a definite number of passengers. The man, of course, was not permitted to get on board again, and was soon out of sight, he and his life-preserver. I rejoice, my dear friend, that we live in an age so enlightened that no such a thing as an individual is supposed to exist. It is the mass for which the true Humanity cares. By-the-by, talking of Humanity, do you know that our immortal Wiggins is not so original in his views of the Social Condition and so forth, as his contemporaries are inclined to suppose? Pundit assures me that the same ideas were put nearly in the same way, about a thousand years ago, by an Irish philosopher called Furrier, on account of his keeping a retail shop for cat peltries and other furs. Pundit knows, you know; there can be no mistake about it. How very wonderfully do we see verified every day, the profound observation of the Hindoo Aries Tottle (as quoted by Pundit)--"Thus must we say that, not once or twice, or a few times, but with almost infinite repetitions, the same opinions come round in a

circle among men."

April 2.--Spoke to-day the magnetic cutter in charge of the middle section of floating telegraph wires. I learn that when this species of telegraph was first put into operation by Horse, it was considered quite impossible to convey the wires over sea, but now we are at a loss to comprehend where the difficulty lay! So wags the world. Tempora mutantur--excuse me for quoting the Etruscan. What would we do without the Atalantic telegraph? (Pundit says Atlantic was the ancient adjective.) We lay to a few minutes to ask the cutter some questions, and learned, among other glorious news, that civil war is raging in Africa, while the plague is doing its good work beautifully both in Yurope and Ayesher. Is it not truly remarkable that, before the magnificent light shed upon philosophy by Humanity, the world was accustomed to regard War and Pestilence as calamities? Do you know that prayers were actually offered up in the ancient temples to the end that these evils (!) might not be visited upon mankind? Is it not really difficult to comprehend upon what principle of interest our forefathers acted? Were they so blind as not to perceive that the destruction of a myriad of individuals is only so much positive advantage to the mass!

April 3.--It is really a very fine amusement to ascend the rope-ladder leading to the summit of the balloon-bag, and thence survey the surrounding world. From the car below you know the prospect is not so comprehensive--you can see little vertically. But seated here (where I write this) in the luxuriously-cushioned open piazza of the summit, one can see everything that is going on in all directions. Just now there is quite a crowd of balloons in sight, and they present a very animated appearance, while the air is resonant with the hum of so many millions of human voices. I have heard it asserted that when Yellow or (Pundit will have it) Violet, who is supposed to have been the first aeronaut, maintained the practicability of traversing the atmosphere in all directions, by merely ascending or descending until a favorable current was attained, he was scarcely hearkened to at all by his contemporaries, who looked upon him as merely an ingenious sort of madman, because the philosophers (?) of the day declared the thing impossible. Really now it does seem to me quite unaccountable how any thing so obviously feasible could have escaped the sagacity of the ancient savans. But in all ages the great obstacles to advancement in Art have been opposed by the so-called men of science. To be sure, our men of science are not quite so bigoted as those of old:--oh, I have something so queer to tell you on this topic. Do you know that it is not more than a thousand years ago since the metaphysicians consented to relieve the people of the singular fancy that there existed but two possible roads for the attainment of Truth! Believe it if you can! It appears that long, long ago, in the night of Time, there lived a Turkish philosopher (or Hindoo possibly) called Aries Tottle. This person introduced, or at all events propagated what was termed the deductive or a priori mode of investigation. He

started with what he maintained to be axioms or "self-evident truths," and thence proceeded "logically" to results. His greatest disciples were one Neuclid, and one Cant. Well, Aries Tottle flourished supreme until advent of one Hog, surnamed the "Ettrick Shepherd," who preached an entirely different system, which he called the a posteriori or inductive. His plan referred altogether to Sensation. He proceeded by observing, analyzing, and classifying facts-instantiae naturae, as they were affectedly called--into general laws. Aries Tottle's mode, in a word, was based on noumena; Hog's on phenomena. Well, so great was the admiration excited by this latter system that, at its first introduction, Aries Tottle fell into disrepute; but finally he recovered ground and was permitted to divide the realm of Truth with his more modern rival. The savans now maintained the Aristotelian and Baconian roads were the sole possible avenues to knowledge. "Baconian," you must know, was an adjective invented as equivalent to Hog-ian and more euphonious and dignified.

Now, my dear friend, I do assure you, most positively, that I represent this matter fairly, on the soundest authority and you can easily understand how a notion so absurd on its very face must have operated to retard the progress of all true knowledge--which makes its advances almost invariably by intuitive bounds. The ancient idea confined investigations to crawling; and for hundreds of years so great was the infatuation about Hog especially, that a virtual end was put to all thinking, properly so called. No man dared utter a truth to which he felt himself indebted to his Soul alone. It mattered not whether the truth was even demonstrably a truth, for the bullet-headed savans of the time regarded only the road by which he had attained it. They would not even look at the end. "Let us see the means," they cried, "the means!" If, upon investigation of the means, it was found to come under neither the category Aries (that is to say Ram) nor under the category Hog, why then the savans went no farther, but pronounced the "theorist" a fool, and would have nothing to do with him or his truth.

Now, it cannot be maintained, even, that by the crawling system the greatest amount of truth would be attained in any long series of ages, for the repression of imagination was an evil not to be compensated for by any superior certainty in the ancient modes of investigation.
The error of these Jurmains, these Vrinch, these Inglitch, and these Amriccans (the latter, by the way, were our own immediate progenitors), was an error quite analogous with that of the wiseacre who fancies that he must necessarily see an object the better the more closely he holds it to his eyes. These people blinded themselves by details. When they proceeded Hoggishly, their "facts" were by no means always facts--a matter of little consequence had it not been for assuming that they were facts and must be facts because they appeared to be such. When they proceeded on the path of the Ram, their course was scarcely as straight as a ram's horn, for they never had an axiom which was an axiom at all.

They must have been very blind not to see this, even in their own day; for even in their own day many of the long "established" axioms had been rejected. For example--"Ex nihilo nihil fit"; "a body cannot act where it is not"; "there cannot exist antipodes"; "darkness cannot come out of light"--all these, and a dozen other similar propositions, formerly admitted without hesitation as axioms, were, even at the period of which I speak, seen to be untenable. How absurd in these people, then, to persist in putting faith in "axioms" as immutable bases of Truth!
But even out of the mouths of their soundest reasoners it is easy to demonstrate the futility, the impalpability of their axioms in general. Who was the soundest of their logicians? Let me see! I will go and ask Pundit and be back in a minute.... Ah, here we have it! Here is a book written nearly a thousand years ago and lately translated from the Inglitch--which, by the way, appears to have been the rudiment of the Amriccan. Pundit says it is decidedly the cleverest ancient work on its topic, Logic. The author (who was much thought of in his day) was one Miller, or Mill; and we find it recorded of him, as a point of some importance, that he had a mill-horse called Bentham. But let us glance at the treatise!

Ah!--"Ability or inability to conceive," says Mr. Mill, very properly, "is in no case to be received as a criterion of axiomatic truth." What modern in his senses would ever think of disputing this truism? The only wonder with us must be, how it happened that Mr. Mill conceived it necessary even to hint at any thing so obvious. So far good--but let us turn over another paper. What have we here?--"Contradictories cannot both be true--that is, cannot co-exist in nature." Here Mr. Mill means, for example, that a tree must be either a tree or not a tree--that it cannot be at the same time a tree and not a tree. Very well; but I ask him why. His reply is this--and never pretends to be any thing else than this--"Because it is impossible to conceive that contradictories can both be true." But this is no answer at all, by his own showing, for has he not just admitted as a truism that "ability or inability to conceive is in no case to be received as a criterion of axiomatic truth."

Now I do not complain of these ancients so much because their logic is, by their own showing, utterly baseless, worthless and fantastic altogether, as because of their pompous and imbecile proscription of all other roads of Truth, of all other means for its attainment than the two preposterous paths--the one of creeping and the one of crawling--to which they have dared to confine the Soul that loves nothing so well as to soar.

By the by, my dear friend, do you not think it would have puzzled these ancient dogmaticians to have determined by which of their two roads it was that the most important and most sublime of all their truths was, in effect, attained? I mean the truth of Gravitation. Newton owed it to Kepler. Kepler admitted that his three laws were guessed at--these

three laws of all laws which led the great Inglitch mathematician to his principle, the basis of all physical principle--to go behind which we must enter the Kingdom of Metaphysics. Kepler guessed--that is to say imagined. He was essentially a "theorist"--that word now of so much sanctity, formerly an epithet of contempt. Would it not have puzzled these old moles too, to have explained by which of the two "roads" a cryptographist unriddles a cryptograph of more than usual secrecy, or by which of the two roads Champollion directed mankind to those enduring and almost innumerable truths which resulted from his deciphering the Hieroglyphics.

One word more on this topic and I will be done boring you. Is it not passing strange that, with their eternal prattling about roads to Truth, these bigoted people missed what we now so clearly perceive to be the great highway--that of Consistency? Does it not seem singular how they should have failed to deduce from the works of God the vital fact that a perfect consistency must be an absolute truth! How plain has been our progress since the late announcement of this proposition! Investigation has been taken out of the hands of the ground-moles and given, as a task, to the true and only true thinkers, the men of ardent imagination. These latter theorize. Can you not fancy the shout of scorn with which my words would be received by our progenitors were it possible for them to be now looking over my shoulder? These men, I say, theorize; and their theories are simply corrected, reduced, systematized--cleared, little by little, of their dross of inconsistency--until, finally, a perfect consistency stands apparent which even the most stolid admit, because it is a consistency, to be an absolute and an unquestionable truth.

April 4.--The new gas is doing wonders, in conjunction with the new improvement with gutta percha. How very safe, commodious, manageable, and in every respect convenient are our modern balloons! Here is an immense one approaching us at the rate of at least a hundred and fifty miles an hour. It seems to be crowded with people--perhaps there are three or four hundred passengers--and yet it soars to an elevation of nearly a mile, looking down upon poor us with sovereign contempt. Still a hundred or even two hundred miles an hour is slow travelling after all. Do you remember our flight on the railroad across the Kanadaw continent?--fully three hundred miles the hour--that was travelling. Nothing to be seen though--nothing to be done but flirt, feast and dance in the magnificent saloons. Do you remember what an odd sensation was experienced when, by chance, we caught a glimpse of external objects while the cars were in full flight? Every thing seemed unique--in one mass. For my part, I cannot say but that I preferred the travelling by the slow train of a hundred miles the hour. Here we were permitted to have glass windows--even to have them open--and something like a distinct view of the country was attainable.... Pundit says that the route for the great Kanadaw railroad must have been in some measure

marked out about nine hundred years ago! In fact, he goes so far as to assert that actual traces of a road are still discernible--traces referable to a period quite as remote as that mentioned. The track, it appears was double only; ours, you know, has twelve paths; and three or four new ones are in preparation. The ancient rails were very slight, and placed so close together as to be, according to modern notions, quite frivolous, if not dangerous in the extreme. The present width of track--fifty feet--is considered, indeed, scarcely secure enough. For my part, I make no doubt that a track of some sort must have existed in very remote times, as Pundit asserts; for nothing can be clearer, to my mind, than that, at some period--not less than seven centuries ago, certainly--the Northern and Southern Kanadaw continents were united; the Kanawdians, then, would have been driven, by necessity, to a great railroad across the continent.

April 5.--I am almost devoured by ennui. Pundit is the only conversible person on board; and he, poor soul! can speak of nothing but antiquities. He has been occupied all the day in the attempt to convince me that the ancient Amriccans governed themselves!--did ever anybody hear of such an absurdity?--that they existed in a sort of every-man-for-himself confederacy, after the fashion of the "prairie dogs" that we read of in fable. He says that they started with the queerest idea conceivable, viz: that all men are born free and equal--this in the very teeth of the laws of gradation so visibly impressed upon all things both in the moral and physical universe. Every man "voted," as they called it--that is to say meddled with public affairs--until at length, it was discovered that what is everybody's business is nobody's, and that the "Republic" (so the absurd thing was called) was without a government at all. It is related, however, that the first circumstance which disturbed, very particularly, the self-complacency of the philosophers who constructed this "Republic," was the startling discovery that universal suffrage gave opportunity for fraudulent schemes, by means of which any desired number of votes might at any time be polled, without the possibility of prevention or even detection, by any party which should be merely villainous enough not to be ashamed of the fraud. A little reflection upon this discovery sufficed to render evident the consequences, which were that rascality must predominate--in a word, that a republican government could never be any thing but a rascally one. While the philosophers, however, were busied in blushing at their stupidity in not having foreseen these inevitable evils, and intent upon the invention of new theories, the matter was put to an abrupt issue by a fellow of the name of Mob, who took every thing into his own hands and set up a despotism, in comparison with which those of the fabulous Zeros and Hellofagabaluses were respectable and delectable. This Mob (a foreigner, by-the-by), is said to have been the most odious of all men that ever encumbered the earth. He was a giant in stature--insolent, rapacious, filthy, had the gall of a bullock with the heart of a hyena and the brains of a peacock.

He died, at length, by dint of his own energies, which exhausted him. Nevertheless, he had his uses, as every thing has, however vile, and taught mankind a lesson which to this day it is in no danger of forgetting--never to run directly contrary to the natural analogies. As for Republicanism, no analogy could be found for it upon the face of the earth--unless we except the case of the "prairie dogs," an exception which seems to demonstrate, if anything, that democracy is a very admirable form of government--for dogs.

April 6.--Last night had a fine view of Alpha Lyrae, whose disk, through our captain's spy-glass, subtends an angle of half a degree, looking very much as our sun does to the naked eye on a misty day. Alpha Lyrae, although so very much larger than our sun, by the by, resembles him closely as regards its spots, its atmosphere, and in many other particulars. It is only within the last century, Pundit tells me, that the binary relation existing between these two orbs began even to be suspected. The evident motion of our system in the heavens was (strange to say!) referred to an orbit about a prodigious star in the centre of the galaxy. About this star, or at all events about a centre of gravity common to all the globes of the Milky Way and supposed to be near Alcyone in the Pleiades, every one of these globes was declared to be revolving, our own performing the circuit in a period of 117,000,000 of years! We, with our present lights, our vast telescopic improvements, and so forth, of course find it difficult to comprehend the ground of an idea such as this. Its first propagator was one Mudler. He was led, we must presume, to this wild hypothesis by mere analogy in the first instance; but, this being the case, he should have at least adhered to analogy in its development. A great central orb was, in fact, suggested; so far Mudler was consistent. This central orb, however, dynamically, should have been greater than all its surrounding orbs taken together. The question might then have been asked--"Why do we not see it?"--we, especially, who occupy the mid region of the cluster--the very locality near which, at least, must be situated this inconceivable central sun. The astronomer, perhaps, at this point, took refuge in the suggestion of non-luminosity; and here analogy was suddenly let fall. But even admitting the central orb non-luminous, how did he manage to explain its failure to be rendered visible by the incalculable host of glorious suns glaring in all directions about it? No doubt what he finally maintained was merely a centre of gravity common to all the revolving orbs--but here again analogy must have been let fall. Our system revolves, it is true, about a common centre of gravity, but it does this in connection with and in consequence of a material sun whose mass more than counterbalances the rest of the system. The mathematical circle is a curve composed of an infinity of straight lines; but this idea of the circle--this idea of it which, in regard to all earthly geometry, we consider as merely the mathematical, in contradistinction from the practical, idea--is, in sober fact, the practical conception which alone we have any right to entertain in respect to those Titanic circles with

which we have to deal, at least in fancy, when we suppose our system, with its fellows, revolving about a point in the centre of the galaxy. Let the most vigorous of human imaginations but attempt to take a single step toward the comprehension of a circuit so unutterable! I would scarcely be paradoxical to say that a flash of lightning itself, travelling forever upon the circumference of this inconceivable circle, would still forever be travelling in a straight line. That the path of our sun along such a circumference--that the direction of our system in such an orbit--would, to any human perception, deviate in the slightest degree from a straight line even in a million of years, is a proposition not to be entertained; and yet these ancient astronomers were absolutely cajoled, it appears, into believing that a decisive curvature had become apparent during the brief period of their astronomical history--during the mere point--during the utter nothingness of two or three thousand years! How incomprehensible, that considerations such as this did not at once indicate to them the true state of affairs--that of the binary revolution of our sun and Alpha Lyrae around a common centre of gravity!

April 7.--Continued last night our astronomical amusements. Had a fine view of the five Neptunian asteroids, and watched with much interest the putting up of a huge impost on a couple of lintels in the new temple at Daphnis in the moon. It was amusing to think that creatures so diminutive as the lunarians, and bearing so little resemblance to humanity, yet evinced a mechanical ingenuity so much superior to our own. One finds it difficult, too, to conceive the vast masses which these people handle so easily, to be as light as our own reason tells us they actually are.

April 8.--Eureka! Pundit is in his glory. A balloon from Kanadaw spoke us to-day and threw on board several late papers; they contain some exceedingly curious information relative to Kanawdian or rather Amriccan antiquities. You know, I presume, that laborers have for some months been employed in preparing the ground for a new fountain at Paradise, the Emperor's principal pleasure garden. Paradise, it appears, has been, literally speaking, an island time out of mind--that is to say, its northern boundary was always (as far back as any record extends) a rivulet, or rather a very narrow arm of the sea. This arm was gradually widened until it attained its present breadth--a mile. The whole length of the island is nine miles; the breadth varies materially. The entire area (so Pundit says) was, about eight hundred years ago, densely packed with houses, some of them twenty stories high; land (for some most unaccountable reason) being considered as especially precious just in this vicinity. The disastrous earthquake, however, of the year 2050, so totally uprooted and overwhelmed the town (for it was almost too large to be called a village) that the most indefatigable of our antiquarians have never yet been able to obtain from the site any sufficient data (in the shape of coins, medals or inscriptions) wherewith to build up even the ghost of a theory concerning the manners, customs, &c., &c., &c.,

of the aboriginal inhabitants. Nearly all that we have hitherto known of them is, that they were a portion of the Knickerbocker tribe of savages infesting the continent at its first discovery by Recorder Riker, a knight of the Golden Fleece. They were by no means uncivilized, however, but cultivated various arts and even sciences after a fashion of their own. It is related of them that they were acute in many respects, but were oddly afflicted with monomania for building what, in the ancient Amriccan, was denominated "churches"--a kind of pagoda instituted for the worship of two idols that went by the names of Wealth and Fashion. In the end, it is said, the island became, nine tenths of it, church. The women, too, it appears, were oddly deformed by a natural protuberance of the region just below the small of the back--although, most unaccountably, this deformity was looked upon altogether in the light of a beauty. One or two pictures of these singular women have in fact, been miraculously preserved. They look very odd, very--like something between a turkey-cock and a dromedary.

Well, these few details are nearly all that have descended to us respecting the ancient Knickerbockers. It seems, however, that while digging in the centre of the emperors garden, (which, you know, covers the whole island), some of the workmen unearthed a cubical and evidently chiseled block of granite, weighing several hundred pounds. It was in good preservation, having received, apparently, little injury from the convulsion which entombed it. On one of its surfaces was a marble slab with (only think of it!) an inscription--a legible inscription. Pundit is in ecstacies. Upon detaching the slab, a cavity appeared, containing a leaden box filled with various coins, a long scroll of names, several documents which appear to resemble newspapers, with other matters of intense interest to the antiquarian! There can be no doubt that all these are genuine Amriccan relics belonging to the tribe called Knickerbocker. The papers thrown on board our balloon are filled with fac-similes of the coins, MSS., typography, &c., &c. I copy for your amusement the Knickerbocker inscription on the marble slab:--

This Corner Stone of a Monument to

The Memory of

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Was Laid With Appropriate Ceremonies

on the

19th Day of October, 1847

The anniversary of the surrender of

Lord Cornwallis

to General Washington at Yorktown

A. D. 1781

Under the Auspices of the

Washington Monument Association of

the city of New York

This, as I give it, is a verbatim translation done by Pundit himself, so there can be no mistake about it. From the few words thus preserved, we glean several important items of knowledge, not the least interesting of which is the fact that a thousand years ago actual monuments had fallen into disuse--as was all very proper--the people contenting themselves, as we do now, with a mere indication of the design to erect a monument at some future time; a corner-stone being cautiously laid by itself "solitary and alone" (excuse me for quoting the great American poet Benton!), as a guarantee of the magnanimous intention. We ascertain, too, very distinctly, from this admirable inscription, the how as well as the where and the what, of the great surrender in question. As to the where, it was Yorktown (wherever that was), and as to the what, it was General Cornwallis (no doubt some wealthy dealer in corn). He was surrendered. The inscription commemorates the surrender of--what? why, "of Lord Cornwallis." The only question is what could the savages wish him surrendered for. But when we remember that these savages were undoubtedly cannibals, we are led to the conclusion that they intended him for sausage. As to the how of the surrender, no language can be more explicit. Lord Cornwallis was surrendered (for sausage) "under the auspices of the Washington Monument Association"--no doubt a charitable institution for the depositing of corner-stones.--But, Heaven bless me! what is the matter? Ah, I see--the balloon has collapsed, and we shall have a tumble into the sea. I have, therefore, only time enough to add that, from a hasty inspection of the fac-similes of newspapers, &c., &c., I find that the great men in those days among the Amriccans, were one John, a smith, and one Zacchary, a tailor.

Good-bye, until I see you again. Whether you ever get this letter or not is point of little importance, as I write altogether for my own amusement. I shall cork the MS. up in a bottle, however, and throw it into the sea.

Yours everlastingly,

PUNDITA.



Creative Commons Non-Commercial Copyright 2017